



Is Your Galley a **BREEDING PLACE** for Illness?

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If chow time is one of your favorite parts of the day, you may not want to read any further. Why? Because a lot more is happening in some of your shipboard galleys than meets the eye.

Here is a list of things I've seen during safety surveys:

- food-service workers sniffing and rubbing their noses while tossing salads
- no paper towels or soap in the heads that galley workers use
- food that has been refrigerated or heated inadequately
- improperly cleaned utensils on serving lines
- meat slicers that haven't been cleaned for a long time
- people sampling food with their bare hands—with supervisors watching. I even saw an MS3, with open sores on his hands, preparing meatballs (yep, you guessed it—without wearing gloves).

So, what does food-service sanitation have to do with safety? For openers, your health depends on it. Foods of animal origin (such as meat, eggs and milk) most often provide the means for transmitting food-borne illnesses. These foods have common characteristics: They provide moisture, a good supply of protein, and warmth. Given enough time, these factors promote an ideal environment for bacteria to grow. It's important to remember that these organisms do not necessarily cause food to change appearance, odor or taste.

Food-borne illnesses can affect one person, or they can incapacitate large numbers in a short period of time. More than half of all reported outbreaks of food-borne illnesses are the result of gross carelessness or deficiencies in food-service sanitation (e.g., food prepared too long before serving, poor refrigeration, poor personal hygiene). Food-borne illnesses are divided into two types: intoxication and infection.

Food-Borne Intoxication. Certain bacteria under favorable conditions produce chemicals (toxins) in food, which, when eaten, will make you ill. The toxins produced by these bacteria are heat stable (e.g., not destroyed by normal cooking temperatures). The illness is characterized by an

abrupt onset (two to four hours after ingestion) of severe nausea, projectile vomiting (the kind that's powerful enough to hit your buddy at five paces), diarrhea, and complete physical exhaustion.

Foods commonly associated with this type of illness are canned or potted meat and fish, beef, cheese, cream or custard-filled pastries, and potato or pasta salads. The usual source of the bacteria involved may be the nose, throat, boils, pimples, or infected cuts on the hands of food-service workers.

Food-Borne Infection. This type of illness is caused by eating food with a bacteria that must multiply in the digestive tract before it produces the toxins that cause the symptoms. Many organisms can cause food-borne infections. Symptoms usually develop within 24 hours and may include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and total exhaustion.

How do you avoid these illnesses? By setting a high standard of sanitation, personal hygiene, and training, then closely supervising all your food-service workers. Otherwise, you risk the well-being of shipmates, which could affect the ability of a ship to complete its mission.

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Editor's Note

The first time I reviewed this story, it reminded me of a tale I've heard my dad tell many times. The setting was nighttime at an Army camp somewhere overseas during World War II. Dad and some fellow soldiers were in the mess tent preparing biscuits for breakfast the next morning. As they were rolling out the dough, little black flecks started appearing in it. Peering through a haze toward the dim lights overhead, Dad and his buddies soon saw the source of their problem. Hordes of gnats were buzzing around the lights, and some were getting zapped, then falling into the dough. When Dad and the others complained to the mess sergeant, he simply hollered, "Aw, shut up, and get back to work! They'll just think they're eating cracked wheat." Thanks for a great story, Pop.